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School of Design

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ART. V. — *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons appointed to consider the Constitution and Management of the School of Design.* 1849.

THOUGH it is not very usual for the English to acknowledge their inferiority to other nations, it cannot be denied that some time ago they seemed disposed to yield the palm of taste and skill in the Fine Arts, with scarcely a struggle, to their continental neighbours. Perhaps it was from bashfulness, perhaps from pride, perhaps—and this we think the most probable—from ignorance: But to whatever cause we are to assign it, there is little doubt of the fact, that not very long ago most of us were ready to run down our own national taste, and to regard as hopeless any attempt to raise or purify it. The efforts of our painters and sculptors had not, indeed, been universally unsuccessful; and we had for some time been forced, in spite of ourselves, to acknowledge that individual genius was not extinct among us. But, while we recognised the merits of Reynolds, of Gainsborough, or of Chantrey, we were slow to believe that the mass of their countrymen could by possibility have among them any kindred feelings, or latent sympathies for the powers which such men as we have named possessed in so eminent a degree. 'Do you think, Mr. Haydon,' said a late prime minister, 'that the people will ever have any taste?' The answer was, 'How should they, if no means are taken to educate 'them?'

We are happy to say, that of late some most praiseworthy endeavours have been made to supply this defect in our national character; and, so far as we have the means of judging, they have been made with the happiest effects. The great increase in the number and character of our Exhibitions, and in the facilities afforded for visiting our most valuable Collections, has been attended by a fully proportionate increase in the number of the visitors, and by a very perceptible improvement in their behaviour and intelligent observation; and this improvement has been most marked, where it is most gratifying, in the lowest class—among the mechanics and artisans.

For another important step in the same direction, the establishment of schools of design, the public are much indebted to the zeal of Mr. Ewart, who about fourteen years ago drew the attention of the House of Commons to the subject, and obtained the appointment of a committee 'to inquire into the best means 'of extending a knowledge of the arts, and of the principles of 'design, among the people (especially the manufacturing popula-

'tion) of the country.' From the report of this committee, which carried on its inquiry for two sessions, the following points appear to have been established:—That from the highest branches of poetical design, down to the lowest connexion between design and manufactures, the arts had hitherto received little encouragement in this country; that a lamentable ignorance of art was manifest among our workmen, especially among those engaged in what are called fancy trades,—the silk trade, the ribbon trade, the china trade, and others—although an earnest desire for instruction appeared to prevail among them; that in this respect the workmen of France, and of other parts of the Continent, enjoyed a very great advantage over our own; one of the results of which was, that French manufactures were in many cases preferred to British, solely on account of the superiority of their patterns; and, lastly, that this superiority on the part of the French workmen appeared to be in a great measure attributable to the Schools of Design diffused through that country.*

This report was presented in 1836. In the following year the Government School of Design was opened at Somerset House; and the establishment of this central institution has been followed at intervals by the opening of branches at Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Glasgow, the Potteries, Leeds, York, Norwich, Newcastle, Nottingham, Coventry, Spitalfields, Paisley, Dublin, Belfast, and Cork. The earliest of these provincial schools, however, was only established in 1840; while some have only commenced operations within the last few months. Indeed, the schools at Cork and Belfast are not yet open for the reception of students. The system is therefore as yet quite in its infancy; and cannot be supposed to have borne fruit enough to enable us to pronounce any definitive sentence upon it. Time enough had, however, elapsed, and sufficient experience had been collected, before the beginning of last session, to make it both reasonable and desirable for Parliament again to take up the question; and to inquire how far the exertions that had been made promised to be successful, how far what we have done justifies us in continuing the experiment, and

* Some confusion has arisen from the translation of the French 'Ecole de Dessin,' or drawing school, into the English 'School of 'Design.' Few, if any, of the French schools are what is properly meant by Schools of Design; and their influence upon French manufactures has resulted from the effect they have had on the general taste of the country, rather than from any direct inculcation of the principles of ornamental design. Drawing enters into the ordinary instruction of the elementary schools of Holland and the Low Countries.

whether the experience of the first few years of its working points to the necessity of any change in the mode of proceeding, or of any fresh steps being taken towards a further development. This task was accordingly undertaken by the Parliamentary Committee over which Mr. Milner Gibson presided last session, and of which the report is now lying before us.

We look upon the result as highly satisfactory. A good deal of the evidence relates to questions relating to the management, which, though doubtless interesting to the parties concerned, are not likely to be particularly so to the public; and which we shall therefore take the liberty of passing over without further notice. But, on those parts which bear upon the success of the schools, and upon the wants which they have brought to light, we now purpose to say a word or two.

Before inquiring what the schools have done, we ought first to ask what they have had to do, and what have been the means placed at their disposal for doing it? We shall then be in a position to see how far it was reasonable to expect that they would succeed, and to measure their actual results by a fair standard.

The object of the schools, generally speaking, was the improvement of decorative art: and it is important to remark at the outset that, at the time they were founded, very few people in the country knew what decorative art was, and still fewer had any definite idea of the way in which to set about improving it. Even now, after a great deal of attention has been given to the subject, we find Mr. Herbert, one of the head masters of the London School, and a man in every way qualified to form a correct judgment on the point, declaring (Ev. 1779.) that he does not believe there are five men in the country equal to teach ornamental art. Indeed, it must be obvious to all who will take the trouble to consider of the matter, that the study is one of no small extent and difficulty. The case is neatly enough stated in the following judicious observations:—'Decorative art,' says the writer, 'like architecture, has a double end to answer: it has to 'serve some purpose of man's physical life, and, at the same 'time, to convey an impression of Beauty. It may be assumed 'that, unless it does the former, it cannot do the latter perma-'nently. The consciousness of the unfitness of an object for its 'purpose soon vitiates the pleasure derived from its beauty. In 'having this double object, decorative art resembles Nature, 'who seems, as far as we understand her, always to provide for 'the existence and comfort of her creatures by means which are, 'in themselves, exquisitely beautiful; and seldom lavishes upon 'us effects of beauty which do not also answer some other end.

'It would thus occupy a very high place as compared with 'other art, were it not for the infinite inferiority of the human 'artist, whose limited means frequently compel him to purchase 'utility by the sacrifice of beauty; and who is obliged, when he 'wishes to attain the latter in purity, to pursue it alone. 'Nature, however, does not do so; and the decorative artist, if 'he would succeed at all, must watch and diligently learn the 'means which she uses to produce this double effect.' Or, as the point is put by another, the distinction between the artist in the Fine Arts and the merely ornamental artist is, that 'the one 'has for his drift the representation of beauty as it appears in its 'natural subjects; the other, the application of beauty to a new 'subject.' These remarks are in themselves sufficient to show what a great amount of labour the education of an ornamental artist involves; and if to the necessity of giving him the power, first, of correctly imitating what he sees, then of discerning beauty in the works of nature, then of analysing the causes of that beauty, and then of applying the principles on which nature works to the materials he is called upon to decorate, we add the necessity which also exists of instructing him in the capabilities of those materials, and, again, of making him acquainted with the history of decorative art from the earliest times, and with the conventionalities adopted at different periods, the magnitude of the task is such as might well alarm us.

But the difficulties which surrounded those to whom this task was assigned must also be taken into the account. In the first place, they had to encounter an array of false notions on the part of the public. It was thought that what they had to do was very simple, and very easy; and might be accomplished in a short time. A sudden development was looked for, and there was an impatience for immediate fruits. The public did not see the necessity for so much elementary instruction being given to students who were, after all, to be engaged in so easy a branch of art,—if art it were to be called at all. Why teach a pattern drawer, it was said, as if you were going to make him an academician? The students themselves were perplexed; they came to the school to learn designing for calicoes, and they were set to draw the human figure. They could not see the use of this instruction; and they often left the school, dissatisfied with what they had done there, and unconscious of the benefit, such as it was, that they had received. But, if the students were dissatisfied, the manufacturers were yet more so. The student, if he remained long enough in the school, could not but be sensible that he had acquired greater power of hand, more correct notions of the beauty of forms and the harmony of colours, and a higher and

purer taste. But the manufacturer, uneducated himself, saw nothing of this, and could not appreciate it. He even despised it when he found that, after all, the student was not so well able to make a design that would work and sell, as his own practised designer—who had learned all he knew in the manufactory, and had never been to school in his life. He would admit, perhaps, that the lad's design looked very well upon paper; but then it would not print, or it would cost twice as much as it ought; in short, it would not do. At the best, therefore, the lad would be taken into the manufactory with some grudging; and put under the old designer. But even if, after a little experience, he should overcome these objections, and learn to compose patterns at once beautiful and workable—should rise, in short, to be a better designer than those who had gone before him—yet the school would not get the credit of his skill. The manufacturer would say, 'Look here; this young man learnt nothing in the school: when 'he came out of it he blundered over the simplest patterns; now 'to be sure he is worth something; but all that he has learned 'has been in my manufactory, not in the school.' The manufacturer, in short, has, in most cases, to go to school himself, before he can learn to appreciate the effect of a sound artistic education.

But we must go a step further, and inquire by what it is that the manufacturer himself is influenced. He is in general no judge of beauty; but he learns the taste of his customers, and he strives to produce what will please them, or, in other words, what will sell. The ultimate control is, therefore, with the public; and here we come to our chief difficulty; for the public itself stands in need of the schoolmaster, as much as either the manufacturer or the designer. We began our experiments,—and this should never be forgotten,—with the taste of the public at a very low ebb. We proposed to raise their taste by a display of good designs—and no doubt this is a most effectual mode of operation. But then occurred the difficulty, that, supposing good designs had been as easy as, in fact, they were hard to obtain, it required a demand on the part of the public to bring them under its notice; and this demand, by the hypothesis, did not and could not exist. The first thing to be done was, therefore, to educate the audience. The most cursory glance at the history of the arts will show that the periods when the greatest works have been produced have been those at which the audience was most capable of appreciating them. It was when a market-woman at Athens could detect a foreigner by the over purity of his Attic dialect, that Grecian eloquence and Grecian poetry reached their highest excellence. It was when the crowd at Florence could with

difficulty be restrained from breaking in to see a newly-finished statue at the Grand Duke's palace, that Cellini, and Rafaelle, and Michael Angelo wrought for immortality. So, too, with us, in our degree. It was not enough to educate artists to produce, we had also to educate the public to demand, the beautiful. But this is not the work of a day, nor, perhaps, of a generation; and nothing could be more unreasonable than to expect that great effects were at once to be produced in a field so new as that of ornamental art, by the first operations of a few half-developed schools. The work could only go on by action and reaction. The demand for the schools indicated a pretty general consciousness that they were wanting — which in itself was very encouraging. That demand has been supplied; and the supply has, if we mistake not, very greatly stimulated the demand. Much, no doubt, remains to be done; but the greatest difficulty was overcome when the first step had been taken; and we may now confidently hope that nothing is wanting to ensure our ultimate success but time and patience.

A few illustrations of the difficulties we have been speaking of may here be given. We take them generally from the evidence given before the committee, and first, from the evidence of Mr. Wakefield, a mousselin-de-laine and cotton printer: —

'Is this a French pattern? — Yes.

'Is this a pattern which you pronounce to be in good taste? — Yes.

'Is it likely to attract the public? — Yes; we think of cutting that.

'*Why* is this in good taste? It is not classical; it does not represent animal life or vegetable life; it is a combination entirely capricious and arbitrary. On what principle then is it that you decide this to be in good taste? — *It is in good taste for sale.* If you come to the true character of the design, I may be wrong in saying that it is in good taste; but we go by the general effect of the pattern; we do not study any particular order, because we frequently mix the styles; that is in cachmere and flowers. A man who has perfect taste might pronounce that to be in bad taste; but still, *for sale*, it does better than being all of one particular class. (Ev. 1061—4.)

The pattern, to which Mr. Wakefield here refers, appears, from subsequent answers, to have been a shawl pattern, and probably exhibited a variety of the Indian pine — which seems to have acquired a patent right to appear, under some disguise or other, upon all shawls, past, present, and to come. Another witness, Mr. Northcote, throws some further light upon this point. He is one of the inspectors of the provincial schools, and appears to have been struck, on visiting Paisley, by the perpetual recurrence of this pine pattern. On asking the reason, he is told that the genuine Indian shawls always have the pine, and that there-

fore the pine is all the fashion; and that the manufacturers would not think of sending out shawls without it, because they would inevitably be rejected. (Ev. p. 112.) Something of the same kind occurs in *papier machè* goods. In these the peacock is supreme; because the peacock, as Mr. Hope informs us, is the distinguishing mark of native Japan ware. Mr. Northcote observed, in a *papier machè* manufactory at Birmingham, that designs, in other respects graceful and well executed, were spoiled by the introduction of the eternal peacock — often on a scale so disproportionate to the rest of the design as to be ludicrous. The manufacturer's answer was, that Japan ware would not sell unless it had the peacock! We shall have to make some remarks presently upon these caprices of fashion; but first let us call attention to one more extract from the evidence. Mr. James Harvey, a practical designer, and a student in the school, is asked, —

'If you found a manufacturer interfering with your design, you would be disinclined to furnish him with any other? You would feel that your own credit as a designer was at stake, if any manufacturer required you to alter your design in such a manner as, in your conception, would spoil its effect? —I have not a sufficient command of business to do that; I am obliged to sacrifice my own feeling in order to suit their taste.

'If the manufacturer considered that the pattern would become more popular, you would feel yourself compelled to alter it according to his suggestion? — Yes.

'Do you find that that occurs frequently? —Yes, in very many instances it does; within the last twelve months I have had several instances.

'He considering it more adapted to the public taste? —Yes; and he does it to get a novelty.

'And you would consider it at the same time an anomaly? —I should call it a bastard.' (Ev. 3664—9.)

These extracts give, we think, a pretty fair epitome of the case. The designer is in the hands of the manufacturer; the manufacturer looks only to sale, and to the fluctuations of fashion as bearing upon the chances of sale; and fashion leads to all manner of anomalies. All this affords subject for reflection. But perhaps we may be allowed, in the first place, to say a few words in defence of this 'deformed thief, fashion,' who appears from the above summary to be the main culprit in the matter. However absurd a fashion may seem at first sight, there is generally a reason for it, which is worth inquiring after. We remember a case in which a manufacturer was detected in the act of printing large quantities of blue cloth with a set of staring Harlequins, Columbines, and other genii of the magic lantern. He was called to account for this by his visitor; and had, as might

be supposed, nothing to say in defence of the taste displayed in the productions; but he pleaded, in mitigation, that the goods were intended for the West Indian market, 'where,' said he, 'they are greedily bought up by the blacks, to whose taste they 'are peculiarly suited.' His friend was, for the moment, silenced; and went away persuaded that the fault was in the audience, and incurable. Some time afterwards he mentioned the matter to another person, who had paid attention to the subject, and who gave this solution: — the goods in question are in demand among the blacks, *not* because of the monstrous patterns which disfigure them, but because the colour of the ground on which those patterns are printed is peculiarly grateful to the eye in hot climates. More seemly patterns on the same ground would be just as acceptable; and might, no doubt, be substituted gradually for those of which you complain, if the manufacturer would but make the experiment. Now we cannot help thinking that our own countrymen may perhaps have been as much maligned in this respect as the poor blacks. And, in fact, we have no doubt that they have become attached to the French, the Japanese, and the Indian patterns, from which it seems so difficult to wean them, on grounds not altogether contemptible. Usually they have taken them up because, with all their faults, they were the best, or perhaps the only good patterns presented to them at the time. And then our designers and manufacturers, mistaking the reason, and not being able to distinguish, have rung the changes upon pines and peacocks, and mixed them up with the most unsuitable ornaments — instead of taking the hint only from what was really good in the design, and producing something beautiful of their own. Thus they have allowed a fashion to grow into a habit, than which nothing can be more injurious to the cause of good taste: for, while the fashion, which bears testimony to some principle, is capable of being turned to good account, the habit, which is the result of pure accident, takes root among us, and becomes the antagonist of all improvement. It is abundantly plain that it is impossible of a sudden to change the fashion of a people; and it is equally plain that it is most unsafe to follow its caprices: but we think it clear to demonstration that manufacturers and designers have it in their power gradually to influence, to lead, and, ultimately, to revolutionise it. The progress of dress is a case in point, with which every one is familiar. In the course of every ten or twenty years we are *gradually* brought to fashions which, were they suddenly presented to us, would be thought intolerable. What, for instance, would our grand mothers, whose waists appear to have commenced at a point corresponding to the top button of a gen-

tleman's waistcoat, have said to a modern gown, with 'a point'? Yet to this we have come by degrees. Violent changes are out of the question; but great changes may be made by those who will take the pains to watch and direct the current of public taste. Upon this subject there are some interesting remarks in the report of Mr. Dyce to the Board of Trade on the Foreign Shools of Design, presented to Parliament in 1840. He says: —

'Design for industry is not an abstract thing; it is not the 'business of the designer to produce good patterns for every pos- 'sible condition of manufacture, but, taking it as he finds it, to 'bring his cultivated taste to bear on its improvement. It is the 'fashion of each succeeding season that he has to deal with. The 'practice of the French manufacturers in this respect seems to 'me worthy of being noticed. It is, I believe, considered by 'them that fashion is something more than the mere caprice of 'the moment; and though individuals of rank or of celebrity of 'some kind may, for a time, give a particular bias to the *mode*, 'yet that the current of taste in the ordinary matters of life has 'its origin, and takes its direction, from the general character and 'habits of society. Hence, they say, if we refer to the history of 'any past age, we shall find the records of its literature and its 'art, and the remains of its every-day appliances of life, all par- 'taking of some common character or sentiment. Acting on this 'notion, the manufacturers of France make it their business to 'discern accurately the characteristics of the under-current of 'feeling to which fashion and its changes are supposed to be due; 'and, by this means, to keep pace with people's inclinations, and 'even to anticipate them. "We know," said one of the Lyon- 'nese manufacturers to me, "that when the fashion of this year '"shall have run its course, every one will have a longing for '"something new; *yet not absolutely new, but something to* '"*which the present mode naturally tends.* That something, '"which, in the world of fashion, is only an indefinite sentiment, '" —in fact, a mere predisposition, — we endeavour to render '"palpable, to give it a strongly pronounced character, and '"assign it a name. Therefore it is that with us fashion is so '"paramount; the objects of industry presented at the com- '"mencement of a season exactly chime in with, and anticipate '"the predispositions of society."'

In spite of something truly French in this Lyonnese gentleman's view, there is great good sense in it. We must not sit down and abuse the fashion; we must try to turn it to account; we cannot controul it, but we may direct it; and if we do so skilfully, we may bring out great results. But we fear the

evidence we possess shows that at present our manufacturers and designers are altogether unqualified for this task. In the Report from which we have quoted, Mr. Dyce points out the great difference in the position which the pattern designer holds in England and in France. The French designer, he tells us, 'is looked upon, in his sphere, precisely in the same light as a 'professor of fine art. You may employ him or not, as you 'think fit; but having given a commission, it is he, not you, 'who is responsible for the merits of the performance.' In England, as we have seen, no such confidence is yet shown. Mr. Harvey is obliged to sacrifice his own feeling to the wishes of the manufacturer, and so to produce designs which he 'would 'call bastards.' Mr. Wakefield, by his own account, appears to dictate to his designers. 'If I see a design which I consider 'good, I say to a designer, "Combine this with that, and send '"it to the works for them to draw half a dozen drawings of '"it."' (Ev. 1015.) Mr. Burchett, one of the masters in the school at Somerset House, looks upon this dictation of manufacturers as 'a source of very great evil.' He also quotes a statement made to him by a practical designer in the school, — that 'in the silk trade, the manufacturer is the judge and *arbiter* '*elegantiæ*, and mangles, at his will, the conceptions of the 'designer, erasing or adding according to his caprice, and alter-'ing both form, colour, and arrangement, according to his own 'fancy.' (Ev. 3462.)

Were it necessary, we might multiply quotations to the same effect. Enough has, however, been said to show with what difficulties the subject is beset: and we would rather now turn to the consideration of what the schools which have been founded have as yet effected, and what they appear capable of effecting. 'From 'a general review of the evidence,' the Select Committee conclude that 'the schools, though far from having attained the 'degree of perfection of which they appear capable, are pro-'ducing beneficial effects, and may, in due time, be expected, 'with energetic support, and under judicious management, to 'realise the anticipations with which they have been founded. '. . . . Large as the field of usefulness appeared when these 'schools were established, it has been found by experience to 'be very much larger than was at first anticipated. As the 'managers of the schools have proceeded, they have found their 'work grow under their hands. For the teaching of ornamental 'art necessarily presupposed the students having attained to a 'certain proficiency in elementary studies, — and this proficiency 'few, if any, were found to have acquired; so that it has been 'necessary to impart it at the beginning of each man's educa-

'tion. The demand for such teaching has been so great in 'proportion to the means which the schools possess of supplying 'it, that they have of necessity assumed more of the character 'of elementary institutions than was originally expected. The 'importance of this sound elementary grounding has not always 'been comprehended, and too great anxiety has been shown in 'some cases to reap premature fruits from the schools; but your 'Committee believe that what has been done in this direction 'has been of very great importance; and that, under all the cir-'cumstances of the case, the managers have been right in endea-'vouring to raise the taste of the great mass of artisans, rather 'than by special efforts to force on a few eminent designers.' (Rep. p. 4.)

These views are fully borne out by the evidence. It appears that since the establishment of the schools between 15,000 and 16,000 students have passed through them; and have carried the skill and knowledge there acquired into the manufactories of the country. How far these students have directly influenced pattern-designing seems to be matter of controversy; but there is an unanimous expression of opinion that they have materially improved *the execution* of designs, and that they have consequently produced a very marked effect upon the taste of the country. Mr. Dyce, a very high authority on such matters, gives it as his opinion, that 'the schools have raised the character of the taste 'of the country, and have produced a positive result that may 'be traced by anybody who understands the history of taste.' (Ev. p. 915.) Mr. Poynter, one of the Government inspectors, is rather more specific. He says, 'Artisans have now an op-'portunity of learning to draw, which they never had before. '. . . . A very large majority of your pupils will never become 'designers, and they never intend to become designers; but 'the best design possible will be ruined if it is put into the 'hands of a man who has no feeling for it, and no ability to 'execute it. I have seen many instances of that. . . . . With 'regard to the Birmingham manufactures, I can see a very 'great change since the school was established. I see a great 'improvement in the drawing of foliage, and other things which 'enter into the execution of designs. To say nothing of the com-'position of the designs, I can see that they are executed by a 'more intelligent class of people; they bear that impress on 'them; and at Nottingham, again, that is particularly the case.' (Ev. p. 528.) Mr. Hammersley, the master of the Nottingham school, makes the following remark:—'No longer than five 'years ago anybody in London would have treated with con-'tempt any suggestion for getting good lace from Nottingham;

'but now lace equal to French lace is exported, and actually 'sold in London as French lace; and that has been designed by 'the students of the School of Design.' (Ev. 2515.) Mr. Wakefield, to whose evidence we have more than once referred, states that we are very much improving in point of taste, and that we are decidedly gaining upon the French in continental markets; a result which he attributes partly to the schools of design. This gentleman remarks that the effects produced upon the patterns are small, but that he finds a great improvement in the under-drawers and fillers-up. (Ev. 1011. 1051.) Mr. Solly, an ironmaster at Sheffield, and chairman of the school there, speaks of it as eminently successful, and highly popular among all classes. On being asked to name any principal houses which have benefited by the school, he says, 'I believe, in order to 'do that, I ought to take a directory and *name them all;* for I 'believe there is not one firm that has not had an apprentice, 'or young man, or workmen in our school.' (Ev. 1197.) Mr. Minton, the eminent porcelain manufacturer, considers that a very great improvement in design has taken place in the pottery wares; and has not the least doubt that taste has improved through the introduction of Schools of Design,—from which he thinks a decided benefit has resulted; 'very decided, consider- 'ing the time that they have been in existence—only two years.' (Ev. 2276.) We find also some interesting returns of the number of firms employing art workmen who are availing themselves of the schools. Of forty-one firms which have returned answers to a circular addressed to them by Mr. Milner Gibson, thirty-one are from places where there are, and ten from places where there are not, Schools of Design. Of the whole number, twenty-six are employing students from the Government,—twelve appear not to do so,—and three make returns in a form which does not supply precise information on the subject. (Rep. p. 3.) Several of the firms, however, which do not employ students appear to have in their employ persons who have been educated in France, or at private schools in this country. Others intimate that they are prevented by distance or other causes from availing themselves of the schools as they would wish. 'We now give a preference to scholars from the School 'of Design in selecting apprentice drawers. We would insist 'on our putters-on also attending the School of Design, if within 'reach.' (Dalglish & Co. Glasgow.) 'All our people were 'taught previous to the establishment of the school in this city. 'We consider the School of Design very beneficial; and should 'we require a designer or drawer of patterns, intend to avail ourselves of the advantages this school offers.' (Clabburn &

'Co. Norwich.) I have one hundred men and upwards, whose 'avocations require artistic ability; but their habits are formed, 'and no chance of their availing themselves of the advantages 'of the Schools of Design. . . . . I look to youth, rather 'than to persons of mature years, for the benefits of these 'schools.' (Mr. Ridgway. Potteries.)

We think these extracts are sufficient to show that the schools have taken root in a most satisfactory manner, and that there is every reason to hope that they will be eminently successful. Nothing can well be more important than that in which they are universally admitted to have succeeded,—the improvement among the under-drawers and fillers-up. It is to their superiority in execution, rather than to their taste in design, which is often execrable, that the French owe their advantage over us. We have been favoured with a sight of a very interesting report made by one of the masters of the School of Design on some of the manufactories of Paris. Speaking of the celebrated establishment of the *Gobelins*, he remarks: 'The artistic powers of 'the actual workmen are evidenced by the fact, that, except for 'beginners, *rule-paper is not used.* The design of the artist, most 'frequently painted in oil, is punctured with small holes an inch 'apart; corresponding with these holes white threads are ver-'tically arranged on the loom at similar distances; *and this is* 'all the mechanical guidance the weaver has;—the design itself 'being placed immediately over his head, about two feet above 'him. Thus guided, he re-produces the forms and colours of 'the design in all their infinite variety—matching, himself, the 'spools of worsted with the original design, and blending and 'strengthening his tints with artistic knowledge and skill.' These are workmen worth having; their education is not a matter of secondary importance; and if our schools have done any thing towards the elevation of our own artisans into such workmen—capable of appreciating and therefore of giving effect to a good design, this alone is sufficient to entitle them to our hearty support, even if it could be shown that they have done nothing important as yet in the improvement of the designs themselves.

We must not, however, omit to notice, that some of the witnesses express themselves dissatisfied with the schools; and that a good deal of evidence has been given to the effect that they are not 'practical.' This seems a little puzzling at first, particularly since all the witnesses who make the complaint admit, on cross-examination, that they are themselves deriving great practical benefit from them in various ways. The charge, however, on being sifted, generally resolves itself into this,—that

the students are not taught to make *saleable* designs. Or sometimes it is fashioned into a complaint, that the education which is given is of a kind to make artists, but not designers. These are two distinct allegations, each of which deserves a few minutes' attention. With regard to the first, we must say, that it seems to us to show considerable misconception as to the nature and purposes of the schools. They are, as the Committee properly remark, 'educational institutions,' and their object is, not to produce designs for sale, but only to educate designers. A doctrine appears to have been broached by one of the students of the school, which has formed the text, we believe, of some lucubrations in a periodical called the 'Journal of Design,' that the school ought to be '*the best market* for the manufacturer in 'want of designs;' and a plan for giving it such a character, by calling upon the students to furnish designs for all the furniture of the Government Offices and Royal Palaces, and setting them up for sale to manufacturers, appears, from some documents printed in the Appendix to the Report, to have been some time ago submitted to the Board of Trade by Mr. Henry Cole, better known, perhaps, to some of our readers under his assumed name of Felix Summerly. But though Mr. Cole was examined at some length before the Committee, we do not find that he then gave any explanation of his plan—of which he has probably, on further consideration, seen the inexpediency. We cannot but think, indeed, that an attempt of this sort would have a tendency at once to lower the character, and to destroy the utility of the school. Supposing it were possible, which it is not, to give the students such instruction as would enable them to compete with the experienced designer of the manufactory in the production of patterns for sale, it would be most injurious to attempt to do so. At present the students are taught to pursue the beautiful; but under such a system they would pursue only the saleable: And the successful student would, of course, be the one whose design fetched the highest price, and had the greatest run. The connoisseurs and teachers might abuse it as they pleased; they might show that 'it was not classical, nor a 'representation of animal life or vegetable life;' the student would answer with Mr. Wakefield, 'It is in good taste *for sale;*' and we are afraid the answer would be conclusive with the majority. Nay, we cannot undertake to say that the teachers themselves would escape the infection; we do not mean that they would lose their own perception of the beautiful, but that they would grow more and more anxious to produce what should be popular, and would thus, insensibly perhaps, fall into the snare of 'working *down* to the taste of the manufacturer.' But we shall be told, This is what your student, educate him how

you will, must come to at last; he may come out of the school with the purest notions you please, but they will soon be soiled when he comes in contact with the manufacturer; and it will be said, not without a good deal of truth, that the manufacturer will be much more likely to bow to the corporate authority of the school in matters of taste, than to that of an individual student. There is some truth, no doubt, in this: but there is an important distinction to be noticed. If James Harvey comes out of the school with cultivated taste, and is compelled in his own despite to alter and mangle his designs to please the manufacturer, the works he will produce may or may not be such as to immortalise him among ornamental artists; but, mangled as they are, no doubt they will be better than they would have been without his schooling, and will do some good in their generation. Next year another designer will follow him, and probably go farther—and then another and another,—all, it may be, destined to encounter mortifications of the same sort, but all likely to do their part in gradually raising the standard of public taste. And all this while, remember, the Fountain head from which they flow is kept pure; and will continue to supply unadulterated waters till the land is cleansed. But once pollute the fountain, and what remains for us? If our light be darkness, how great is that darkness! This appears to us to be an all-sufficient reason for preserving the educational character of the school, and not suffering it to degenerate into 'a 'market for designs.'

There are other and weighty reasons too. The student could hardly hope to rival the experienced practical designer, in a contest where superiority of taste would form but one element, and that not the most important, of success. A trick of arrangement, an almost imperceptible diversity, might suffice to give a very inferior design such a superiority in point of cheapness or convenience, as would defeat the student, and, what is worse, might ruin the credit of the school. For were *the School* to undertake such a contest, there would of course be jealous eyes upon it. Every failure would be magnified; and as nothing is so easy as to find fault, it would run great risk of discomfiture, and the discomfiture of the school would be the discomfiture of the cause of Taste. Besides, it strikes us that private designers might fairly complain if Government were to apply the public funds to the establishment of a mere mart for designs. It would be said, Why not do the same by all other professions? Why not have a government college for architects, to which recourse might be had by all persons desiring to build? or for engineers, where the best plans for railways or bridges should be obtained? The comparison, we think, would be perfectly fair; and we believe that in design, as

in other matters, the principles of Free-trade are the principles of common sense; and that the golden rule is this,—Educate as highly as you can; but leave the rest to competition.

We pass by, then, the complaint that the schools are not practical because they do not furnish the manufacturer with *a market* for designs. The next complaint is a more serious one; namely, that the schools do not give a practical education; and do not supply the student with the particular kind of instruction that he seeks. If this be true, it is, no doubt, a great fault; for it must never be forgotten that these schools were founded and are supported by Parliament, for the particular purpose of educating men to become designers and art-workmen; and that if they neglect this object, and apply themselves to giving only general artistic instruction, they disappoint the intentions of Parliament, however valuable they may be in other respects. We cannot, however, find any proof that they are justly liable to this imputation. That the schools, in their present undeveloped state, are doing all that might be done in the way of education, practical or otherwise, is not pretended by any body; nor do we think it likely that they will do so until Parliament shall open its purse-strings much wider, and raise its present meagre grant to three or four times its amount. But there is ample evidence to show that the education which is now being given is in the right direction, and is, so far as it goes, *eminently practical* and successful. We observe that those who are disposed to find fault say, they cannot discover that, in any of the manufactures of the country, there is one design which can fairly be attributed to the unaided work of the students in the School of Design (Ev. 1984.),—a remark about as sensible, if we are to understand it in the only sense in which it is true, as if one should say that he could not find a single treatise on philosophy, or a single edition of a classic author, that could fairly be attributed to the unaided work of an Eton boy or of an undergraduate at Oxford! or a single fine historical painting executed by an actual student in the Royal Academy. But what are we to infer from that? Assuredly not, that the students are not being educated to produce such designs in good time; for we have direct evidence to prove that they are. In the first place, there is the evidence of Mr. Nickisson, who is studying in the London School with a view to acquiring 'so much artistic 'knowledge as to enable him to lead a number of designers;' and who tells us that he hopes the knowledge he is acquiring will be 'very useful to him indeed' in this respect, and that 'for 'four or five years to come he should wish to pursue the same 'course of study.' (Ev. 1139, 1166–8.) Then we have Mr. James Harvey, *a practical designer* for several sorts of woven

and printed fabrics, who has been studying at Somerset House for four or five years; he 'attributes to it his main artistic 'knowledge,' and finds it of 'considerable service to him in his 'profession.' (Ev. 3650, 3655.) Then, again, there is Mr. Apsley Pellatt, the eminent glass manufacturer, who employs as his principal, or indeed his sole designer, a young man selected from the same school. (Ev. 3415–16.) Then, passing over the valuable evidence of Mr. Redgrave and Mr. Burchett as to the extent to which design is taught in the same school, we have Mr. Mitchell of Sheffield, and Mr. Hammersley of Nottingham, bringing forward abundant proof that, in those schools at least, the students are so educated as actually to produce designs very far superior to any that had been in use in their respective neighbourhoods before. And there are some eighteen or nineteen cases mentioned by Mr. Burchett (3481, 3482.) of students who have within his own knowledge obtained good employment as designers, after leaving the school. Indeed, considering how short a time most of the schools have been founded, how much there has been to do, how inadequately they have been supplied with the means of doing it, how much work has often been thrown upon a single master, where there ought to have been two or three,—and lastly, what inducements there have been for the students to leave the schools as soon as ever they have acquired so much knowledge as to enable them to command ready employment at increased wages, we cannot hesitate to draw the conclusion that the success of these institutions has been very remarkable indeed.

There are some, however, who believe that still greater progress might have been made under a different system; and who think the time of the students is needlessly taken up with instruction of a kind more suited to promote the fine arts than the study of ornament. We hope we shall not be thought very impertinent if we 'disable the judgment' of some who are most forward with criticisms of this sort; for many of them are really incompetent to form an opinion upon the matter at all. There are very few persons who are aware what amount, or even what kind, of instruction is required in order to make an ornamental artist; and it must be obvious that, when we begin to educate, we necessarily have to impart an amount of instruction of which the uneducated do not at once perceive the bearing. There would be no great virtue in education if it were not so. Those who know nothing of astronomy are, doubtless, surprised to find the students of that science beginning with the rudiments of mathematics,—and probably think that a quicker and more practical course of instruction might easily be devised; nay, it is not improbable that they could establish something like a

proof of the soundness of their views, by bringing forward pupils of their own, who, without knowing a square from a circle, would be able to point out the principal constellations better than this or that learned mathematician. Perhaps this sort of feeling is natural also among manufacturers, and some of the more ignorant of those whom they call designers,—persons who, having never had a theoretic education themselves, and having got on somehow or other without it, are apt to undervalue its importance. But it was precisely for the purpose of taking us out of the hands of this class that the schools were founded; and if they had done nothing but establish the necessity of some theoretic teaching, we should say they had done good service. To produce great results in any branch of art, it is necessary to elevate the tone of those engaged in it; and to give them a feeling for its scientific or ideal perfection, before they are called upon to practise it for money. But this can never be accomplished but by a scientific education preceding a practical one; and though some 'practical men,' as they delight to call themselves, affect to sneer at the doctrine, we believe it would be found that those who have attained to any real eminence as mere practical men, have always lamented the want of a scientific education for themselves, and have been forward in recommending it to others. We attach little weight, therefore, to the complaints of those who are disappointed at the slowness of the process of forming ornamentists, and who would prefer a superficial to a thorough course of training.

But there is another class of objectors who must be treated with greater deference. It appears that a controversy exists as to the order in which the instructions should be given, the place which the teaching of figure drawing should occupy, and the extent to which it should be carried. It is held, we believe, by some, that to teach the drawing of the human figure is altogether unnecessary; others think that it may be necessary to some classes of students but not to all; others, again, regard it as universally indispensable. There are also some who hold that the figure-drawing should come first, and the special instruction in ornament follow it; others who think that the student should begin with ornament and end with the figure; and others who think that both should be taught together. Upon so debateable a question we, as laymen, enter with much timidity; and, in what we are about to say, we desire to be understood as throwing out suggestions for the consideration of others, rather than as announcing any confident or dogmatic views of our own.

In the first place, then, let us consider for what purposes the ornamentist should study the human figure. It is not merely in order that he may be able to introduce it into decoration; since,

if this were the case, there would be large classes of designers who would clearly have no need of it at all. Yet it forms an important part in the education of every ornamental artist. His first object is, of course, to acquire freedom of hand and the power of imitating what is set before him. This, it is said by some, is acquired by practice in figure-drawing, far better than in any other manner; and therefore they argue that we ought to place figure-drawing in the first rank, and assign to it the first importance in the education of the designer. The assertion is, however, challenged by other authorities; who deny that greater power is communicated by drawing the figure than by any other kind of drawing. This is purely an artist's question, and to artists we must leave the solution,—merely remarking that the study of the figure appears to be of a severer character than the study of other forms—and to be, on that account, well adapted to produce a careful and simple style.

But those who advocate this its 'grammatical use,'—as it is well styled by Mr. Redgrave—are met with an objection that the time spent in this part of the teaching would be turned to better account, if devoted to studies in which the pupil, while obtaining as good, or nearly as good, an education for his hand and eye, would be at the same time acquiring specific knowledge of a kind that would be directly and immediately useful to him,—or, in other words, to the study of conventional ornament. Now we do not at all underrate the importance of giving instruction in conventional ornament. It is, of course, a main part of the business of the school; but we must protest against the notion that the study of conventional ornament can ever be sufficient for a designer in any branch of manufactures whatever. If we are ever to attain originality of invention—if we are ever to have a school of our own—we must draw our inspiration, not from the productions of other schools, but from nature. The ornamentist, as we saw in the beginning, applies the principles of beauty which he discovers in Nature to a new subject; but how is he to do this if he do not take Nature for his guide? What sort of a landscape would a painter produce, if he studied only Claude and Ruysdael, instead of going to the rocks, trees, and streams themselves, from which Claude and Ruysdael drew? If an attempt to imitate the works of Nature at second-hand is always insipid, how vain must be the attempt to apply to a new subject the principles on which she produces those works, without first taking the pains to acquire them from herself! Conventional ornament is an adaptation of natural beauty to the productions of human industry. Undoubtedly it is most important to the student to

know how the Greeks or Italians contrived to turn natural forms to account for this purpose: but first let us take care to familiarise him with the natural forms themselves; so that, when he is at work for himself, he may compose his variations upon the true type, and not upon the conventional rendering of it. The herald who drew his ideas of the king of beasts from the Royal Arms of England, pronounced the lions in the Tower to be not the least like real lions! The mistake was not of much consequence in the particular instance referred to; but we should hardly feel satisfied with a designer who could only arrange the lily or the rose upon classical principles, — without having himself an acquaintance with the natural peculiarities and varieties of the flower. A close study of natural forms is therefore indispensable to the designer—and should form part of his education at an early period. Indeed, in the formation of a great ornamentist we should be inclined to put off the study of conventional ornament as long as possible; and, to borrow a metaphor from a kindred art, we would have him learn his grammar thoroughly, before he begins to think of style.

We are aware that this theory cannot always be acted upon. Perhaps it is at present inapplicable to the majority of cases. Students, who come for a few months' special instruction to assist them in their daily avocations, cannot be set down to the rudiments; but must be assisted in their own way, — or they will leave the school. We cannot help suspecting, indeed, that there has been rather too much prudery in this respect at Somerset House. Mr. Richardson, one of the masters, mentions a case where a student — an ironmonger by trade — asked him to assist him in making a design for a stove: he set him to work accordingly; but Mr. Wilson — then the director of the school — coming by, took the student away, and set him to work upon an elevation of the temple of Theseus, desiring him to copy it by a scale of modules and minutes: in a few days the young man left the school! * We dare say the director was quite right in thinking the young man wanted more elementary instruction; and that it would have been a good thing for him to have gone through a thorough course of it: but the young man was not willing to drudge—and so he was not benefited at all. Even the committee of management, which was substituted for the director on the abolition of that office, appear to have run some risk of splitting on the same rock; and, in their zeal for sound teaching, to have somewhat overlooked the peculiarities of the class for which

* Mr. Richardson's letter; see Report of Special Committee of Council of School of Design, 1847.

they had to prescribe the course of education. It seems to us that nothing can be sounder than their general scheme of instruction for all such pupils as desire really to become — what the schools were at first intended to produce — superior designers. But they should remember that superior designers take long in educating; that the public are impatient for fruits; and that there are multitudes of young men in the country who, without desiring a thorough training, are eager to avail themselves of the advantages of the school for special purposes of their own, — men, in short, who want assistance rather than education. For such as these a great deal of latitude must be allowed. When a friend of ours obtained his commission in a county regiment, he went to a master of arms, to learn the sword exercise — and naturally asked how long it would take him to acquire it. 'Why, sir,' was the reply, 'if you only want to learn the sword exercise 'well enough to pass in the yeomanry, I can show you that in 'two lessons; but if you want to become a master of your 'weapon, we must begin at the beginning, and have twelve 'lessons at least.' That is just the case with the students in the Schools of Design. Nine tenths of them cannot afford to go through the twelve lessons; but they want the two, just to enable them to pass in the manufactory. Superior designers, to be sure, cannot be formed in this way; yet a great improvement may be effected in the class which so materially influences designing, — the under-drawers, the fillers-up, and the putters-on — who have hitherto rather impeded than assisted the designer, owing to their inability to execute his conceptions with any thing like taste or fidelity. We think it abundantly clear that the Schools of Design have already done a great deal in this direction; and we hope that neither the public nor the committee will underrate its importance.

Reverting to the question of the figure-drawing, we cannot help expressing our doubts whether another important reason for enforcing it has not been overlooked. We need offer no apology for extracting the following remarks of a writer whom we have already quoted. He says: 'Almost all subjects of 'decorative art are intended to serve some purpose more or less 'intimately connected with the human person; and, in order to 'adapt them to it, a knowledge of the figure is indispensable. 'Even in architectural decorations those ornaments and colours 'ought to be chosen which are best adapted to the sizes and 'complexions of the men and women who are to use the build-'ing; but, in respect of the smaller things, — such as dress and 'furniture, which come in immediate contact with the person, — 'too much care cannot be taken to make them suit it. A

'chair, for instance, ought to be comfortable, and it ought also 'to be elegant in form; and this elegance should not only be 'seen when it is untenanted; but it ought to throw its occupier 'into a graceful attitude, and look well with him in it. But a 'cabinet-maker will hardly succeed in this, unless he knows 'enough of the human figure to understand what a graceful 'attitude is, and how to produce it. The example is a little 'homely, and perhaps has a smack of too much luxury; but the 'principle is one which may be extended to all our furniture,— 'to carriages and their fittings,—to the colour and patterns of 'papers, of carpets, of curtains, of furniture-covers,—and, more 'especially, to all things made for the purposes of dress.' 'It 'is much to be wished,' he continues, 'that tailors and milliners 'could be made to admit this, and to submit to a little instruction 'in a School of Design; but I fear they are too powerful, and their 'customers too submissive subjects, to allow us to hope for any 'thing of the kind. But the makers of the materials are in a 'better position; and ought to learn to produce stuffs suited for 'all varieties of size and complexion, and for different lights, 'but always to produce something adapted to some human 'figure, and not the hideous spots and railroad stripes which 'now frequently cut up and disguise their wearers.'

But we turn gladly from the regions of controversy to ground on which all agree. Whatever may be thought of this or that particular system of instruction, there can be but one opinion as to the beneficial effects which must necessarily result from the opening of schools of art in all quarters of the country. It is but little to say that a young man is better employed in copying the most inapposite Pompeian decorations than in tippling at the public house; nor are we disposed to make too much even of the gratifying account which Mr. Minton gives (Ev. 2648.) of the sinecure which 'the stipendiary magistrate who sits five days a 'week' at the Potteries, has enjoyed since the opening of the schools at Stoke and Hanley*; but the bearing of these schools upon the education of the country strikes us as exceedingly important. Standing aloof, as they do, from everything like sectarian controversy on religious questions, and offering attractions for a class which is least commonly to be found in our national and other schools, they are of great service as outposts of education, in an interesting, but rather inaccessible country. To each is attached a collection of valuable specimens and works of art, and a lending library for the use of the students. These are thus brought

* There are mines, too, we rejoice to say, in which the introduction of *Music* has been equally beneficial.

within reach of a class comprising many who would think lightly of book learning for its own sake, and many who are unable to get any book learning even if they desired it. A great amount of instruction is thus indirectly communicated to them. They are found eagerly to avail themselves of the library; and the examination of the various models and examples awakens in them a spirit of inquiry into their origin and meaning, which must continually be leading them on to more and more knowledge.

Nor is this all: incalculable good may often be effected by familiarising them with forms and principles of beauty, which must often prove to be vehicles of moral as well as of intellectual improvement. In this luxurious and self-indulgent age such effects are of the highest value. Splendour and ostentation are now carried very far with us; but good taste and refinement are much neglected. The consequence is that our pleasures and desires partake too much of the sensual, and tend rather to the degradation than to the exaltation of our nature. Finery is too generally preferred to elegant simplicity; dress, and furniture, and all the other appliances of civilised life, are esteemed according as they minister to the display of wealth, rather than according to their real beauty. Thus the rich are made arrogant, and the poor discontented: And the evil feeds itself. The love of beauty, which was given us to act as a counterpoise to our love of ease and riches, is so far perverted, as to act as a stimulus instead of a check; and what should have been for our health is turned into an occasion f falling. What then is the appropriate remedy? Clearly it is to place before all a different standard of enjoyment,—a standard which the poorest may perceive to be within his reach, and which the richest will fail of attaining without the cultivation of some of the higher qualities of his nature. We hear much of the effect which the natural character and scenery of a country has upon the natural character of its inhabitants—how their tastes and habits are formed upon it. Does it never occur to us, while we meditate on these things, that we live in the midst of an artificial world, and of scenery which is principally of our own creation, and is therefore under our own command—and which yet exercise upon us effects in some degree similar to those which we attribute to the world of nature. Creatures of habit, we learn to like that which we live with; we become as it were acclimated to certain modes of life, and even forms of ornament,—and love them from association. We should augur well of a country where high art and decorative art appealed to the same parts of our nature, and acknowledged principles in common; where public taste had been so far advanced as to prefer skilful work-

manship to costly materials, and an elegant wooden platter to the most sumptuous gold or silver plate, less beautifully wrought.

Notwithstanding our ostentatious habits, no one will deny that of late years a step has been taken in this direction. The attention of the public has been aroused; and we have become conscious of our short-comings. In these matters the desire of improvement is half the battle. Crude theories in art, incorrect practices, and bad examples cannot be suppressed by act of parliament. But the taste of a people may gradually be raised, by taking every opportunity of making it familiar with the best possible models of every description. And, to whatever extent Schools of Design may contribute to this enviable consummation, they will in the same degree secure every immediate and minor object, in this their more complete success. At a late meeting of the School of Design established in the Potteries,—Mr. Labouchere in the chair,—the President of the Board of Trade was requested to assure his colleagues, 'that no branch of manufacture more urgently required the advantage of Schools of 'Design than that of china and earthenware; that no district 'has the prospect of being more extensively benefited by their 'operation than the Staffordshire Potteries; and that they trust 'no population will be found more grateful for their establishment.' Mr. Labouchere truly observed, in reply, that, after all which Government might do, the real success and permanent interests of such institutions must mainly depend on the support given them by the communities in which they exist; and we agree with the *Athenæum* in rejoicing that in one instance, at least, this element of final prosperity seems likely to be supplied.

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